

GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN



Many older Americans approaching or in retirement suddenly find themselves caring for and raising their grandchildren. A grandparent stepping in to raise grandchildren or other relatives is not a new development. What is new is the growth in this phenomenon. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1997 3.9 million children were living in homes maintained by their grandparents, up 76 percent from 2.2 million in 1970. In a majority of the cases, grandparents are the primary caregivers. Researchers report that at some point more than one in ten grandparents raise a grandchild for at least six months. Typically, grandparents are caregivers for periods which are far longer.

Grandparents who are caregivers tend to be women. The majority of grandparents raising their grandchildren are younger than age 65. Based on 1996 Census data, 48 percent of grandparent caregivers are between age 50 and 64; 33 percent are younger than age 50 and 19 percent are age 65 plus.

Why the Increase?

There are many reasons why grandparents step in to care for their grandchildren, including:

- Death of Parents
- Incarceration of parents
- Unemployment of parents
- Substance Abuse by parents
- Teen pregnancy
- Family violence
- HIV/AIDS

Grandparent Caregivers Face Challenges

Grandparent caregivers face a myriad of challenges in nearly all aspects of their lives when they assume the role of parent. They are prone to psychological and emotional strain as well as feelings of helplessness and isolation. Many grandparents raising grandchildren face financial difficulties, too. In fact, researchers have reported that grandparent caregivers are 60% more likely to live in poverty than are grandparents not raising grandchildren.

Grandparent caregivers often neglect their own physical and emotional health because they give priority to the needs of their grandchildren. Often the grandchildren in their care have unmet physical, emotional, and developmental needs that require special assistance.



Grandparents raising grandchildren encounter problems that can require them to seek legal authority in order to make decisions on behalf of their grandchildren. Grandparents may need legal authority to get their grandchildren medical care, enrollment them in school, and to enable them to receive immunizations and vaccinations, public assistance, and supportive services. Grandparents can find themselves in need of respite services, affordable housing, and access to medical care.

The Aging Network Responds

State and Area Agencies on Aging across the country have instituted programs and services to assist grandparent caregivers. Many have published information guides and have established resource centers to assist grandparent caregivers to identify and access available services. Other important interventions offered around the country include respite services and support groups.

To learn about grandparent caregiver resources in your community, contact the local Area Agency on Aging, listed in the government section of your telephone directory, usually under aging, elderly, or senior services. An Area Agency on Aging can also be located by contacting the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116.

National Resources

Many national organizations provide information and assist grandparent caregivers deal with the challenges of raising their grandchildren. An extensive list of resources and valuable links is available on the Administration on Aging web site at <http://www.aoa.gov>.

Working in close partnership with its sister agencies in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the AoA provides leadership, technical assistance, and support to the national aging network of 57 State Units on Aging, 655 Area Agencies on Aging, 225 Tribal and Native organizations representing 300 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal organizations, and two organizations serving Native Hawaiians, plus thousands of service providers, adult care centers, caregivers, and volunteers. For more information about the AoA, please contact:

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Eldercare Locator: 1-800-677-1116, Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET